

Harmony and Disharmony in the Anthracite Coal Fields, 1902 (Part 2)

By S. Robert Powell, Ph.D.

The Anthracite Coal Strike Commission met from November 1902 to February 1903. The proceedings began on October 30, 1902, with a week-long tour of the anthracite region to view the physical conditions in the coal fields and the coal mining operations there. Five hundred fifty-eight witnesses were heard by the Commission: 240 for the UMW, 153 for non-union workers, 154 for the operators, 11 called by the Commission. The testimony filled 56 volumes (over 10,000 legal pages, besides a vast quantity of statistical data and other exhibits).

The Anthracite Strike Commission Proceedings in Scranton, PA in 1902: In November (from the 14th to the 22nd) and December (from the 3rd to the 20th) 1902, the Anthracite Coal Strike Commission heard testimony in the Lackawanna County Courthouse in the Superior Courtroom (now Courtroom No. 3).

Clarence Darrow was the attorney for the miners' group; former U. S. Attorney General Wayne MacVeagh, was the attorney for the operators' group. John Mitchell testified, not as president of the UMW but as the "representative of the anthracite mine workers" and presented the demands (if you please) of the unionized mine workers to the Commission. Represented by Clarence Darrow, John Mitchell was the first and most celebrated witness at the public hearings.

The photograph shown here (in a pdf file titled "Court Room No. 3. Lackawanna County Courthouse, The Anthracite Strike Commission proceedings in Scranton"), now in the collection of the Carbondale Historical Society, was formerly in the collection of Charles Melville, Jr., 49 Lincoln Avenue, Carbondale, PA. In the lower left corner of this photograph we read: 'Copyright 1902 / T. E. Dillon / Scranton, Pa.'

Seen in this photograph are three members of the Anthracite Strike Commission (Baer, Wilson, Spaulding) as well as Clarence Darrow and John Mitchell. (Our thanks to Bob McDonough, Olyphant, for his help in identifying those five persons in this photograph.) Because of the significance of these proceedings in the Lackawanna County Courthouse, the UMW/John Mitchell statue/monument on the grounds of the Lackawanna County Courthouse, as well as the Courthouse itself, were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1997.

On December 17, 1902, the miners' union (UMW) concluded its presentations in Scranton and the Commission declared a holiday recess. The Anthracite Coal Strike hearings re-opened in Philadelphia on January 9, 1903, in the Federal Building.

Testimony on behalf of the operators was then heard. George Baer's summation on behalf of the mine owners was presented on Thursday, February 12. Clarence Darrow's closing statement / summation before the Commission on behalf of the miners was delivered on Friday, February 13, 1903. In Jack McDonough's, *The Fire Down Below The Great Anthracite Strike of 1902 and the People Who Made the Decisions*, (p. 114), we read the following about Clarence Darrow's closing statement / summation before the Commission: "Darrow spoke for eight hours without a note in his hand and the transcription of those remarks shows a man in almost frightening control of both

the structure and the rhythm of language as well as the dynamics of the courtroom. To read either of these closing statements is to read a philosophy as profound and clear as any ever put down." At the conclusion of Darrow's summation, the overflow crowd in the Philadelphia courtroom gave him a standing ovation that lasted for more than five minutes."

Clarence Darrow was 45 at the time of the hearings. Two decades later he would serve as the attorney in the Scopes "Monkey Trial" and in the Leopold-Loeb case (in Darrow's hometown of Chicago). Previously, he also defended Eugene Debs during the Pullman Conductors Strike of 1894.

Findings of the Anthracite Coal Strike Commission: On March 18, 1903, the Commissioners presented their report to Roosevelt, who made it public on March 21, 1903, the first day of spring.

Although the commissioners heard some evidence of terrible conditions in the anthracite coal fields, they concluded that the "moving spectacle of horrors" represented only a small number of cases. By and large, social conditions in mine communities were found to be good, and miners were judged as only partly justified in their claim that their annual earnings were not sufficient "to maintain an American standard of living. "

Awarded by the Anthracite Strike Commission to the Miners: The mine workers were awarded a 10 percent wage increase, with an eight to nine hour working day, without pay reduction (most of the men went to a 9-hour day, but engineers and firemen went from 12 hours to 8). Miners' laborers were now to be paid directly by the company rather than by the miner himself. The miners would now have the right to demand (if you please) weight checks on their cars. Safety rules were strengthened. No one was to be refused employment because he belonged to a union.

The Commission also created an arbitration board to settle labor disputes for the three years during which the award was to be in force. The Commission also prohibited discrimination against union workers and criticized the employment of children.

The Return of the Miners to Work: The miners met in convention in Wilkes-Barre, Tuesday, October 21 and, after accepting the president's plan of settlement, formally declared the strike to be over. The miners in convention also decided that the men would go back to work on Thursday, October 23, 1902, and so, after 5 months (163 days) off the job, the miners went back to work.

The strike cost the coal companies at least \$74 million due to reduced freight and coal receipts and a loss of \$25 million in wages to the miners.

The settlement of the 1902 anthracite coal strike was commemorated with a parade in Carbondale. The newspaper story about this parade is described in the article given below, dated October 30, 1902, that is included in one of the Gritman scrapbooks in the collection of the Carbondale D&H Transportation Museum:

"CARBONDALE MINERS ON MITCHELL DAY / About 2,000 miners, all from Carbondale, except a single local from Simpson, contributed to the observance yesterday of John Mitchell day by a parade that covered the central streets of this city, to the accompaniment of music of bands

that quickened their steps and heightened the jubilating spirit that filled them. The day was, perhaps, a trifle sharp and keen in the chill winds that blew, while occasional flurries of snow gave a foretaste of winter, that was not relishable. / It was a holiday for the workers in anthracite, and the holiday spirit showed itself in the light-hearted manner of the marchers. Besides commemorating the victory [alleged by some] of the first strike, in 1900, the occasion was taken as a means of rejoicement and felicitation over the recent strike settlement. All of the locals were nearly fully represented, evidence of the place that John Mitchell holds in the hearts of Carbondale miners. None other than mine workers participated in the celebration.

"There was one display in the procession that came in for a good deal of adverse criticism. It was independent, however, of the mine workers' programme of the day and was frowned upon by the officials. / At the rear of the line was an ash or truck wagon, from up Simpson way, that contained a half-dozen foreigners, one or two of whom were women. There was a plentiful supply of beer aboard, which was freely drank by the men, and in some instances passed out to the crowd. Next to the driver sat a man holding a crudely built banner or sign. There was an attempt to print an inscription, the attempt resulting as follows: 'How is Mitchell. He is all right. Whose all wright [sic]. Mitchell. Hurrah.'

"Ministers' Acceptance: The local pastors who were invited to join in the celebration of John Mitchell day, met yesterday forenoon, and in accepting the invitation, addressed the following communication to the United Mine Workers: / Carbondale, Pa., Oct. 28, 1902. / United Mine Workers: / Dear Sirs: We thank you cordially for your courteous invitation to ride in the procession tomorrow, John Mitchell day. We are glad with you that your differences with the operators have been referred to arbitration, tomorrow also being a celebration of winning the demand [if you please] for such reference made from the beginning of the union. We congratulate you that in our city there has been little violence in comparison with what has occurred elsewhere. We wish to see all honest workmen receive good wages. / We accept your kind invitation in order that we may attest our interest in the welfare of laboring men. But lest our presence be misconstrued, we desire to put on record our disapproval of the intimidation, bloodshed and boycotting which have marred the course of the strike. As servants of God, who said, 'Thou shalt not kill,' we must refuse to seem to condone in operator or workman violation of the divine law, or infringement upon the sacred rights of 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,' which our country stands for. We believe the right of individual contract is of such colossal importance that the welfare of our country depends upon it. Yours sincerely, / A. F. Chaffee, Charles Lee, R. A. Sawyer, H. J. Whalen."

And so, harmony--precarious to be sure--was re-established in the anthracite coal fields of northeastern Pennsylvania.

End of Part 10 of *Harmony and Disharmony in the Anthracite Coal Fields*.